

Wm L. Garrison

130

Roxbury, Jan. 21, 1868.

My dear Whittier:

By the love I bear you, I have felt no small concern to see, by the newspapers, that you have been seriously indisposed; though the announcement that you are recovering has given me much relief. I trust this will find you at least as well as usual. Never robust—the mental sword always too sharp for the physical scabbard—you have had for many years to guard your life by careful nursing and simple regimen, and avoidance of exposure to wind and weather such as others can take not only without risk, but with increasing vigor. Still exercise, I pray you, all possible vigilance to this end; for while you may deem it of very little consequence when the summons for your departure to the Spirit realm may come, yet your prolonged earthly sojourn is a matter of no small importance to your fellow-men, so long as your brain shall remain as fertile in thought, your mind as broad and



comprehensive in its range, and your heart as overflowing with love and good will to mankind, as hitherto. I will not ask, in oriental phrase, that your shadow may never be less; because that would be to confine you here beyond what would be agreeable to you or comfortable to others; but I do earnestly desire for you "length of days" very much beyond your present period of life, — and that not so much on your own account as on that of others. Nevertheless, in view of what you have written and done to make this a better and a happier world, by a noble example and the most quickening testimonies for truth and right, you have really attained a great age. You know — perhaps you do not, though — that, of all living poets, I place you at the head, not in the realm of poetic fancy or artistic excellence, but for the spirit of truth, the purity of thought, and the love of freedom and justice irrespective of caste and clime, pervading all your writings. Liking you so well as a whole, I have not yet been able to decide which of your effusions I like best.



Ever since my return from Europe, I have been wanting to see you; and I regretted that I could not make you a visit when I went down to Newburyport, last month, to be one of a "surprise party" given at the house of our old and beloved friend William Ashby, in commemoration of his eightieth birthday. It was a most pleasant and gratifying occasion to the large company it brought together. The dear good man was "taken all aback" by such a cordial presentation of friends and fellow-townsmen in so unexpected a manner. Who is more deserving of respect, esteem, affection and honor for his uprightness and worth?

Allow me to express surprise that you, a Quaker of the William Penn and George Fox stamp, should have been induced to write a hymn to be sung at the dedication of the "Memorial Church," erected by George Peabody, at Georgetown, first, as he provided, to the memory of his mother, and, second, "to the worship of Almighty God, in its simple purity, (?) according to the Evangelical faith, as acknowledged and



accepted by our dear mother, and as recognized by the Orthodox Congregational churches of New England." [En passant - in consecrating a church first to the memory of his mother, and second to the worship of Almighty God, Mr. Peabody has scarcely shown the usual orthodox reverence - putting the creature before the Creator. And why a church should be erected to the memory of his mother simply because of her adoption of orthodox views, (for no other reason is given,) is not so apparent. Nor is it clear to me why Jesus, the crucified, should bless the church on that account, as supplicated in the last verse of your hymn. Indeed, the first verse, it seems to me, makes null and void the last:-

"Thou dwellest not, O Lord of all!

In temples which Thy children raise."

If this be so, then it is not becoming those who profess to be Christians either to erect or to dedicate such buildings specially in his honor or praise; for this is only to Judaize. "Neither in this mountain nor at Jerusalem... but in spirit and in truth." ]



Mr. Peabody can do a good many things with his money; but there is one thing that he cannot do, and that is, he cannot build "the House of God." Yet he complacently assumes that he has done so, and, consequently, he attempts (poor foolish man!) to clothe his pile of brick and mortar with peculiar sacredness, in the most approved Jewish or Pagan manner. Moreover, "it must be devoted to religious and strictly moral purposes only, excluding forever all lectures, discussions or controversies on political or other subjects of whatever nature inconsistent with its object as the House of God, and a memorial of the dead." There is no doubt as to the meaning of this language. As the world goes, Mr. Peabody is a remarkably benevolent man with his abundant means, obtained by good luck and financial ability; but it is to be observed that he has never given a farthing to any unpopular cause, but only where he has been sure to risk nothing as to reputation, but rather to gain personal renown. He has a morbid aversion to all "discussions"



and "controversies." He belongs to the timid, conservative party who are always crying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace; who can strain at a gnat, and easily swallow a camel; whose piety goes in silver slippers, and is embodied in an "iron clad" creed. In his "Memorial Church," no new ideas must be promulgated by any occupant of the "sacred desk" at any time, no struggling reformatory movement advocated, nothing allowed with reference to Church or State outside of rigid, dogmatic, inflexible theology as understood and asserted in the olden time<sup>and by his mother</sup>! Better that not one stone of such a pile should be left upon another! Mr. Peabody always sympathized with the slaveholders of the South as against the abolitionists, and deprecated all agitation of the subject of slavery. During the rebellion, he gave no hearty support to Mr. Lincoln in England, and, provided the Union could have been preserved by letting the South have her own way, would have gone for any compromise to that end.



I do not forget, nor will I undervalue,  
his munificent gift of one million of dollars  
for bettering the condition of the poor of London;  
and a similar gift for the education of the  
Southern masses, without distinction of color.  
The object in each case is praiseworthy. But,  
"though I give all my goods to feed the poor,  
and have not charity, I am nothing," said  
Paul; and the charity to which he referred  
was that love which animated the bosom of  
his Master, leading him to expose the corrup-  
tions of the Church, the venality of priestly  
hiredlings, and the idolatrous hollowness of  
those who exclaimed, "We have Abraham for  
our father," and thereby bringing himself to the  
cross. So thoroughly wedded to the past, fossil-  
ized, is Mr. Peabody, that, if he had been co-  
temporaneous with Jesus in Judea, he would  
certainly have kept company with the Phari-  
sees and Scribes, who, undoubtedly, in a cer-  
tain direction, were very amiable and cour-  
teous, <sup>yet</sup> ~~and~~ who believed in no progress, but  
only in worshipping the dead past.



But—aside from any consideration of Mr. Peabody himself—I think the time has gone by for you or me to give any countenance to the erection or consecration of any building as "the house of God," or as invested with a peculiar sanctity. To quote your own words, in your beautiful and tenderly expressed poem in the Atlantic Monthly for February—

"Nor ritual-bound nor templeward

Walks the free spirit of the Lord."

And, by the way, I think you have not silenced your guest as to his objections to stated, formal meetings like those you have been so long in the habit of attending; for, though you only meet with "farmer-folk," and there is neither organ nor bell attached to your meeting-house, and no priest but a very good woman has been accustomed to hold forth, these are unimportant incidents, and do not touch the question of observing days and seasons as a religious obligation. Pardon my freedom.

Your attached and admiring friend,  
Wm. Lloyd Garrison.

John G. Whittier.